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Peace Corps's Safe Distance From C.I.A., et al.

To the Editor:

As the principal Senate sponsor of legislation to separate the Peace Corps from the Action agency, I was astonished by the letter (Nov. 27) from Donald Thorson, Action's assistant director for legislative affairs, accusing The Times of inaccurate reporting. It is Mr. Thorson who is inaccurate.

Mr. Thorson states that it is "not true" that the Peace Corps has a strict prohibition against former intelligence agents within its ranks. The truth is that ever since its inception in 1961 the Peace Corps has had a policy designed to preclude even the appearance of a connection with intelligence activities.

This policy bars any former agent or employee of the C.I.A. from ever serving as a Peace Corps volunteer or employee. And it strictly prohibits anyone else from serving if he or she has engaged in intelligence activities in the preceding 10 years.

Thomas Pauken, director of Action; Loret Ruppe, director of the Peace Corps; and William Casey, director of the C.I.A., have said that they intend to continue this policy.

Mr. Thorson states that Thomas Houser served in Army counterintelligence 13 years before he became deputy director of the Peace Corps in 1969. However, no information to that effect was brought to the attention of the Senate at the time of Mr. Houser's confirmation.

Mr. Thorson also claims that separating the Peace Corps from Action would "cost the taxpayers more money." The evidence points in exactly the opposite direction. Internal Peace Corps budget documents estimate that, while separation will cost about \$900,000 in first-year administrative expenses, it will save \$1 million annually thereafter.

Finally, the controversy over Mr. Pauken's nomination arose not because he is a Vietnam veteran, as Mr. Thorson falsely suggests, but over the question whether the extent and nature of



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his service in military intelligence violated — or appeared to violate — a policy indispensable to the effectiveness of the Peace Corps, if not to its very survival. The Foreign Relations Committee narrowly voted for his confirmation, 10 to 7.

Making the Peace Corps an independent agency will reaffirm its fundamental policy of keeping free of all taint of an "intelligence connection." It is a sorry state of affairs that a high official of Action, in his determination to keep the Peace Corps within that agency at any cost, is willing to jeopardize a policy intended to protect the integrity of the Peace Corps and the safety of its volunteers and staff.

ALAN CRANSTON
U.S. Senator from California
Washington, Dec. 9, 1981

To the Editor:

Despite Donald Thorson's claim, the Peace Corps has always had and continues to have a strict prohibition against former intelligence agents within its agency.

Former C.I.A. employees may never work for the Peace Corps. However, there are many other agencies and offices of the Federal Government that deal in one way or another with intelligence, such as the State Department's Office of Intelligence and Research, which does no intelligence gathering.

For this type of office, the rule is that no employee may work for the Peace Corps for a period of 10 years after leaving the intelligence-related agency and that after the 10-year period, considerations of Peace Corps employment are made on a case-by-case basis.

Tom Houser's employment by the Peace Corps seems to have been in keeping with this stipulation. The "strict prohibitions" on corps employment of former intelligence "agents" and other employees of intelligence-related agencies are still in effect.

It is important that these rules and their continued applicability be known.

Peace Corps volunteers in service in the third world have frequently been exempted from manifestations of anti-Americanism because it has been clear that they are working indisputably outside intelligence-gathering efforts, which tend to penetrate every other facet of American presence abroad. A breakdown in this understanding could lead to dangerous situations for Peace Corps volunteers, who are often far from the protection an embassy might offer. The "strict prohibitions" have served and continue to serve a purpose.

Mr. Thorson's remarks about the "independence" of the Peace Corps also provide no correction. No one has ever contended that the Peace Corps is independent of the State Department. What is being sought is independence from Action, a superstructure created by the Nixon Administration in which the identity of the Peace Corps has been submerged to the extent that many Americans wonder whether it still exists.

It does exist, and it performs effectively in its role as a part of the American foreign policy establishment. The Peace Corps will continue to perform effectively as long as it remains clearly free of intelligence-gathering connotations and is minimally encumbered by a Washington bureaucracy.

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